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ABSTRACT

The "We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution" program is an instructional program on the history and principles of U.S. constitutional democracy for elementary, middle, and high school students. The program is based on curricular materials developed by the Center for Civic Education. At the high school level, classes may choose to enter a formal competition structured as simulated congressional hearings, which are excellent for testing students' knowledge of U.S. democracy, with the brightest classes advancing from congressional, district, and state competitions to the national finals. Twenty-one of the 51 classes that competed at the 2001 national finals in Washington, DC, were randomly selected to participate in the survey (n=345). Findings reveal that, compared with various representative national samples, students participating in the "We the People" program national finals competition possess more knowledge of U.S. democratic institutions and processes. This paper reports on the survey results and is divided into the following parts: (1) "Introduction and Summary of Findings"; (2) "Sampling and Methodology"; (3) "'We the People...' Participant Political Knowledge"; (4) "'We the People...' Participant Political Attitudes"; (5) "Student Feedback on the 'We the People...' Program"; (6) "Conclusion"; (7) "References"; and (8) "Attachment A (Survey Instrument)." (BT)

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"We the People… The Citizen and the Constitution": Knowledge of and Support for Democratic Institutions and Processes by Participating Students National Finals 2001

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July 2001

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I. Introduction and Summary of Findings

The **We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution** (**We the People...**) program, administered by the Center for Civic Education (Center), is an instructional program on the history and principles of American constitutional democracy for elementary, middle, and high school students. The program is based on curricular materials developed by the Center and acclaimed by leading educators. At the high school level, classes may choose to enter a formal competition structured as simulated congressional hearings, which are excellent for testing students' knowledge of American democracy, with the brightest classes advancing from congressional, district, and state competitions to the national finals. During the past 14 years, more than 82,000 teachers have taught more than 26,500,000 students the **We the People...** curriculum, with 2 million students participating in year 2000.

Past Educational Testing Service (ETS) studies have shown that students who used the curriculum "significantly outperformed comparison students" on every topic (ETS studies 1988, 1990, 1991). For example, a random sample of 900 high school students who studied the **We the People...** curriculum outperformed 280 college sophomores and juniors enrolled in political science courses at a major university. **We the People...** students excelled in every topic area and on almost every test item compared to (ETS). Another study found that **We the People...** high school students develop a stronger attachment to political beliefs, attitudes, and values essential to a functioning democracy than most other students and adults (Brody 1993).

In spring 2001, a survey designed to assess the impact of the **We the People...** program on student knowledge and attitudes toward democratic institutions and processes

was given to a random sample of students participating in the Center's national finals competition. The **We the People...** students were best suited to survey in assessing the impact of the program because they, after participating in all levels of the program and showing remarkable mastery of the curriculum, have received the most intensive exposure. The survey instrument incorporated questions previously administered to high school seniors, college freshmen, and/or adults in various national studies. The percentages of correct responses by **We the People...** students were compared to those of the respondents in the national samples.

The findings of this study reveal that, as compared with various representative national samples, students participating in the national finals competition of the **We The People...** program possess more knowledge of American democratic institutions and processes. Compared to a representative national sample of high school students surveyed by the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics assessment, **We the People...** students as a group proved more knowledgeable about every category and even scored higher in every single question about civic education delineated in the survey. Ninety-one percent of **We the People...** students scored higher than the national sample mean. Furthermore, the findings indicate that program participants perform better as problems become more difficult and more based on political knowledge. More knowledge-based assessment included five open-ended response questions derived from the American National Election Studies (ANES) that produced results similar to the NAEP assessment comparisons, with 66.3% of **We the People...** students answering all five questions correctly, in contrast to 16.5% of a corresponding national sample of adults. On average, **We the People...** students

outscored the original ANES sample, whose respondents ranged in age from 18 to over 80 years, by 28%.

In the midst of various longitudinal studies showing that political interest and support is declining among America's youth, **We the People…** students also display a much more positive attitude toward American democracy. They displayed less cynicism and more involvement with the American democratic process than a nationally representative sample of high school students with similar socio-demographic qualities (*Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth, 1997).* In addition, compared to a representative national sample of college freshmen conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, **We the People…** students place more importance on keeping track of political affairs, influencing the political structure, community leadership, helping others in difficulty, and developing a meaningful philosophy of life.

From these findings, the Center infers that students who participate fully in the **We the People…** program are more likely than nonparticipating students to become active, engaged, and compassionate citizens, as well as to develop a greater propensity to show support for democratic institutions and processes.

II. Sampling and Methodology

Each spring, in Washington, D.C., the Center for Civic Education conducts a national competition for 51 classes, one from each state and the District of Columbia. Nearly all of the participating classes earned the right to compete at the national finals by winning their state competition. The classes participated in the Center's **We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution** program, including simulated congressional hearings, an integral part of the program. Twenty-one of the 51 classes that competed at the 2001 national finals were randomly selected to participate in the survey (N=345). Teachers administered the survey in classrooms in a test setting during May and June.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was designed by the Center to measure political knowledge and support for democratic institutions and processes, as well as to elicit students' feedback on the program. The survey consists of 43 open- and close-ended questions (see Attachment A), from previous national surveys. All questions on the Center survey have been used in national surveys of high school seniors, college freshmen, and/or adults. For this study, responses of **We the People...** students were compared to respondents' answers on the appropriate national survey. The percentages of correct responses by **We the People...** students were compared with those of the relevant national sample. However, the **We the People...** national finalists represent a select sample, while the comparison groups are nationally representative samples.

III. We the People... Participant Political Knowledge

Political knowledge is a prerequisite for engaged citizenship and political participation, as citizens must possess enough knowledge to effectively and responsibly participate in the political process. Previous studies have shown that young adults are less knowledgeable politically than older adults (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996:159). Unfortunately, both groups have demonstrated themselves to be ignorant of many facts about American government (Niemi and Junn, 1998:9). Furthermore, political and civic engagement in America has been deteriorating steadily generation by generation for the past half-century, compounding the political ignorance of young adults today (Putnam, 2000). Survey results from the **We the People...** civic education program indicate that program participants are significantly more knowledgeable in all facets of political knowledge than their peers and even older adults. They are better informed and more engaged politically than their counterparts, which suggests good civic education programs may offer a solution to widespread ignorance about the government and political process.

A. We the People... versus NAEP Results

Questions 1-23 of the **We the People...** survey are designed to measure levels of political knowledge. They consist of public-release questions from the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics assessment that evaluated student knowledge and understanding of the U.S. government and politics. The NAEP

assessment takes place once a decade and is sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education. The 1998 NAEP civics assessment surveyed a nationally representative sample of 7,763 twelfth grade students.

The questions can be divided into categories that address aspects of American democracy: 1) *principles*, 2) *institutional structure*, and 3) *democratic system*. In addition, there are two categories that address more general aspects of civic education: 1) the *theoretical application of democracy* and 2) *ability to reason, analyze, and make inferences* from various texts and graphs. The percentages of correct responses of **We the People...** students were compared to those in the representative sample of high school senior responses from the 1998 NAEP assessment (hereafter referred to as the national sample).

1. *Knowledge of American Democratic Principles*

In this category, **We the People...** students outscored the national sample by an average of 24%. The two questions in which both parties scored significantly higher centered on the intent of the Framers to limit potentially abusive powers; **We the People...** students averaged 96% and the national sample averaged 73%. Compared to the other three questions in this category, these two questions were also the simplest. Rather than having to digest and infer from quotations, they asked for direct recall of the correct answer. Both groups performed poorest on the question that required students to identify that the majority opinion in the *Lochner* case is based upon the general principle that government should play as small a role as possible in civil society and the economy. Sixty-four percent of **We the People...** students answered this question correctly

compared to 28% of the national sample. Interestingly enough, the other question in this category concerning the *Lochner* decision showed the worst comparative performance by **We the People...** students, outscoring the national sample by only 11%. Because this question requires knowledge of present political attitudes rather than the more fundamental principle of substantive due process, one could argue that **We the People...** students have a deeper understanding of the founding principles essential for a more enlightened citizenry. The question requiring students to conclude that John Locke's quote about the "ends of society and government" refers to defining and limiting government power was the best representation of the overall performance of both groups in this category, with **We the People...** students scoring 86% and the national sample scoring 58%.

Principles of American Democracy (percentage correct)	**WTP**	**NAEP**	**WTP - NAEP**
Limited government power is a principle articulated by John Locke's quote about the "ends of society and government."	86%	58%	28%
The primary purpose of the Bill of Rights was to limit the power of the federal government.	95%	70%	25%
Contrary to the time of the *Lochner* ruling, it is now generally accepted that the government should take some actions to defend the health and safety of workers.	75%	64%	11%
The principle that government should play as small a role as possible in civil society and the economy is directly consistent with the reasoning behind the *Lochner* ruling.	64%	28%	36%
The Framers of the constitution wanted to limit the power of majorities in order to protect the rights of individuals and minorities.	97%	75%	22%
Average Correct Response	83%	59%	24%

2. *Knowledge of the Institutional Structure of American Democracy*

The overall results in this category of questions that address student knowledge of the structure of American democratic institutions were very similar to the previous category, with **We the People…** students outscoring the national sample by an average of 24%. Three of the five questions were based on students' ability to draw information from a map of the congressional districts of Louisiana. Two of these three questions could have been answered correctly by knowing that congressional districts are primarily drawn according to population size. With little variance within each group between the two questions, 87% of **We the People…** students answered them correctly while the national sample scored 61%. The other question out of the three could have been answered correctly by recalling that a state's legislature determines its congressional districts. But this information proved tougher for both groups, with **We the People…** students and the national sample scoring 77% and 54%, respectively.

Institutional Structure of American Democracy (percentage correct)	**WTP**	**NAEP**	**WTP – NAEP**
While Congress and the courts have some authority over foreign policy, the president and the state department have the greatest authority.	61%	47%	14%
Congress has two houses, one in which state representation is based on population and one in which all states have equal representation. This was outlined in the Connecticut Compromise.	91%	60%	31%
A state's legislature determines its congressional district boundaries.	77%	54%	23%
A state's increase in population that is proportionally larger than that of other states is likely to increase the number of its congressional districts.	89%	65%	24%
A congressional district occupying a relatively small area may indicate that it includes a large urban area.	85%	57%	28%
Average Correct Response	81%	57%	24%

Recalling either the content of the Connecticut Compromise or Congress's present bicameral nature proved to be a significantly easier task for **We the People…** students than the national sample as they scored 91% and 60%, respectively. Both groups performed poorly on questions in this category about authority over foreign policy. However, with **We the People…** students and the national sample scoring 61% and 47% respectively, this was the poorest relative performance for **We the People...** students, outscoring the national sample by only 14%.

3. *Knowledge of the American Democratic System in Action*

The American political system is multi-faceted and complicated; it is no surprise that questions that cover this category in the survey varied widely in correct responses by both groups. This category consists of two questions about the role of the U.S. Supreme Court; two questions about the direct role our citizens can play outside the three branches of government; and one question about the legislative process in Congress. Both groups scored the highest on the questions about the direct role citizens play in our democracy, with the two groups combining to average 95% on the question that asked students to recognize that the American Association of Retired Persons would be opposed to cutbacks in the Social Security Program, and 70% on the question that asked students to infer that the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights would most likely be opposed in our country by Americans who fear that the government could act in ways inconsistent with our national interests.

The American Democratic System in Action (percentage correct)	**WTP**	**NAEP**	**WTP - NAEP**
The American Association of Retired Persons would be most concerned about and opposed to severe cutbacks in the Social Security program.	97%	93%	4%
Most of the bills introduced in the House of Representatives are never sent by committees to the full House.	64%	36%	28%
The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Lochner v. New York* that the law limiting the numbers of hours people could work was unconstitutional.	75%	33%	42%
In *Lochner*, Peckham argues for judicial activism to limit government power while Harlan argues for judicial restraint but a more active role by government.	60%	39%	21%
The U.N. Declaration of Human Rights has been opposed by some Americans because of fear that international agreements will force the U.S. to act in ways not consistent with its national interest.	87%	52%	35%
Average Correct Response	76%	51%	25%

Although **We the People...** students, scoring 97%, outperformed the national sample by merely 4% on the Social Security question, the gap widened on the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights question, where participants outscored the national sample by 35%. This large difference in comparative scores may be due to the fact that the Social Security program is highly publicized and very much a part of common knowledge, rendering the question very easy for both groups and producing an effect with both groups nearing each other as they approach the ceiling of 100%. Students had trouble answering a simple recall question about the death of most bills in committees in Congress, with **We the People...** students scoring 64% and the national sample scoring 36%. Still, the **We the People...** out-performance was 28%. The other two questions about the Supreme Court's decision in the *Lochner* case not only required knowledge

about judicial review, judicial activism, and judicial restraint, but also analytical skills—more than simple recall. Yet both groups combined performed slightly better on these two questions than the legislative process question, with an average score of 68% for **We the People...** students and 36% for the national sample, demonstrating that student knowledge and performance varies in unexpected ways, even within the same category.

4. *Skills in Applying Democratic Theories to Practice*

This category of questions asks students to apply their knowledge about basic political structures and some theoretical reasoning to answer questions about achieving the ends of democracy. Two questions are about limiting the power of majorities while the other two are about representation.

Theoretical Application of Democracy (percentage correct)	**WTP**	**NAEP**	**WTP - NAEP**
One of the methods of limiting the power of majorities is the Supreme Court's power to overturn unconstitutional laws.	75%	34%	41%
Because parties do not have to win a majority of the vote in any district, countries with proportional representation systems tend to have more political parties than those with single-member district systems.	75%	48%	27%
Countries with proportional representation systems tend to have more political parties than those with single-member district systems because parties in proportional representation systems do not have to win a majority of the vote in any district, making it easier for smaller parties to gain representation.	67%	43%	24%
One could argue that a proportional representation system is better than a single-member district system because in proportional representation systems, the balance of power in the legislature is more representative of the popular vote.	63%	44%	19%
Average Correct Response	70%	42%	28%

The first two questions in this category ask students to first know that in order to protect the rights of individuals and minorities, the power of majorities must be limited, and then asks them to go a step further by identifying judicial review by the Supreme Court as one of the means of realizing this concept. While 75% of **We the People…** students answered both questions correctly, the national sample showed more variance, with 48% recognizing the necessity of limited power of majorities and 34% identifying judicial review as a means of doing so. Sixty-seven percent of **We the People…** students correctly identified the most reasonable defense for the proportional representation system, in contrast to 44% of the national sample. As for the question regarding a single-member district system, 63% of **We the People...** students correctly identified the most reasonable defense for it, in contrast to 43% of the national sample. In general, this category of questions proved the most difficult for both groups, producing the lowest category averages of 70% for **We the People…** students and 42% for the national sample, perhaps due to the very high level of reasoning skills and knowledge necessary to answer these questions correctly. The difference of 28% between the two groups in this category was also the largest in the survey.

5. *Ability to Analyze, Reason, and Make Inferences*

Although the four questions in this category required some political knowledge to answer correctly, a much larger focus was on the students' application of skills. Their ability to respond to a given text or graph rendered political knowledge unnecessary to answer the questions correctly. Two questions were based on Judge Learned Hand's quote about the source of liberty for Americans; one based on a graph of the number of

government employees; and one based on text from the Bill of Rights and the U.N. Declaration of Rights.

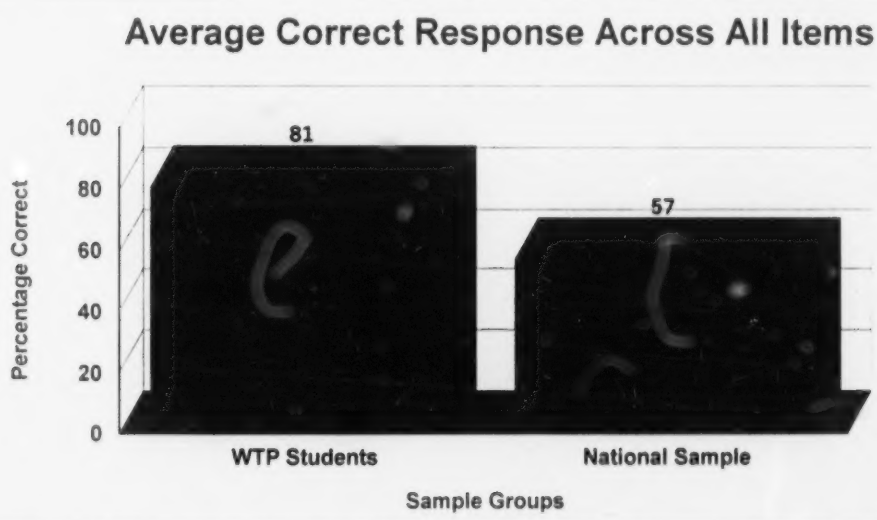
Ability to Analyze, Reason, and Make Inferences (percentage correct)	**WTP**	**NAEP**	**WTP - NAEP**
'Individual liberties depend on citizens committed to the protection of those liberties' best summarizes Judge Learned Hand's argument about the state of the American democracy.	94%	73%	21%
Judge Learned Hand believed it was most important that citizens protect their freedoms through political participation.	94%	64%	30%
The graph shows that local governments employ more people than do state or federal governments. This is because local governments meet the direct needs of so many people in so many different places.	94%	86%	8%
The first Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and Article 22 of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, show a common concern for individual rights.	93%	79%	14%
Average Correct Response	94%	76%	18%

While **We the People...** students performed with extremely little variance, scoring 94% on three questions and 93% on the other one, the national sample's scores varied from 64% to 86%. The national sample scored 73% on summarizing Judge Hand's quote about liberty dependent on citizens committed to liberty, but scored 64% on taking the inference a step further in recognizing his attitude that political participation by citizens is most important for liberty. On a question that assessed nothing more than graph reading skills, the national sample scored 86%, approaching the 94% performance by **We the People...** students. This demonstrates that while **We the People...** national finalists may have slightly higher reading skills, these cannot account for the large differences in NAEP survey items designed to test political knowledge. On the question

asking students to identify that both the Bill of Rights and the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights share a concern for human rights, the national sample scored 79% compared to 93% by **We the People…** students. This category of questions produced the highest results for both groups, with the gap between the two groups being the smallest. This points to deeper political knowledge by **We the People…** students as the major difference, not simply higher academic skills.

6. Aggregate Comparisons

All in all, **We the People...** students scored a mean of 81% correct for 23 questions in contrast to 57% for the national sample. The average difference, therefore, is 24%. **Ninety-one percent** of **We the People...** students outperformed the national sample mean by answering 14 or more questions correctly.



7. Overall Summary

Furthermore, as the questions become more complex and demanding, the gap between **We the People…** students and the national sample increases. Both groups performed the best in questions assessing their ability to analyze, reason, and make inferences. This category provided the closest performance of **We the People…** students relative to the national sample, who outscored them by 14%. Both groups, on the other hand, scored lowest on questions about the theoretical application of democracy. In this category of questions, **We the People...** students outscored the national sample by 28%, the greatest difference across all five categories. Furthermore, this trend can also be seen when analysis turns from categories of questions to individual questions. Both groups performed the poorest on in the same nine questions with no seeming pattern, suggesting that the majority of the lower scores were due to question difficulty, not subject matter. **We the People...** students scored a 67% on these nine questions compared to the national sample's 39%, producing a difference of 28%. Compare this to 21%, which is the difference between the two groups' scores in the other fourteen questions in the survey. No matter how the data is approached and analyzed, the difficulty of the questions and the comparative performance of the national sample move in opposite trends.

The numbers also have a response to the note made earlier about the disparity between the two sample groups due to the fact that the **We the People…** sample represents an elite group of students (those who advanced to the national finals competition) while the national sample is representative of the entire nation. While the difference between the groups in questions that assess their ability to analyze, reason, and make inferences was 18%, it was 25% in the other nineteen questions that tested for

political knowledge. This significant disparity between the two groups' performance in political knowledge questions compared to their differences in analysis skills implies that even with the **We the People...** competition's national finalists' supposed superior academic capabilities neutralized, the gain in their political knowledge after participating in our program is real and promising.

B. We the People... versus ANES Results

Five open-ended questions on the **We the People...** survey were derived from the American National Election Studies (ANES), a collection of national surveys conducted annually since 1952. Funded by the National Science Foundation, ANES are designed to present data on issues such as Americans' enduring political positions, social and political values, and participation in political life. Each study contains information from interviews conducted with 1,000 to 2,000 respondents, aged 18-80+. The samples are representative of the major regions of the contiguous United States as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The open-ended questions were chosen because Delli Carpini and Keeter (1989: 304-306) suggest that this five-item index has strong construct validity and is an excellent measurement with which to gauge political knowledge. Responses of **We the People...** students were compared to the 1991 NES sample. Students in the **We the People...** program outscored the national sample on all five questions.

Five Item Knowledge Index (percentage correct)	**WTP**	**1991 NES (age 18-80+)**
The job or political office held by Dick Cheney (Al Gore)	94%	74%
Judicial review	95%	66%
Veto override percent	82%	34%
Party control of the house	80%	68%
Party ideological location	89%	57%
Average Correct Response	88%	60%

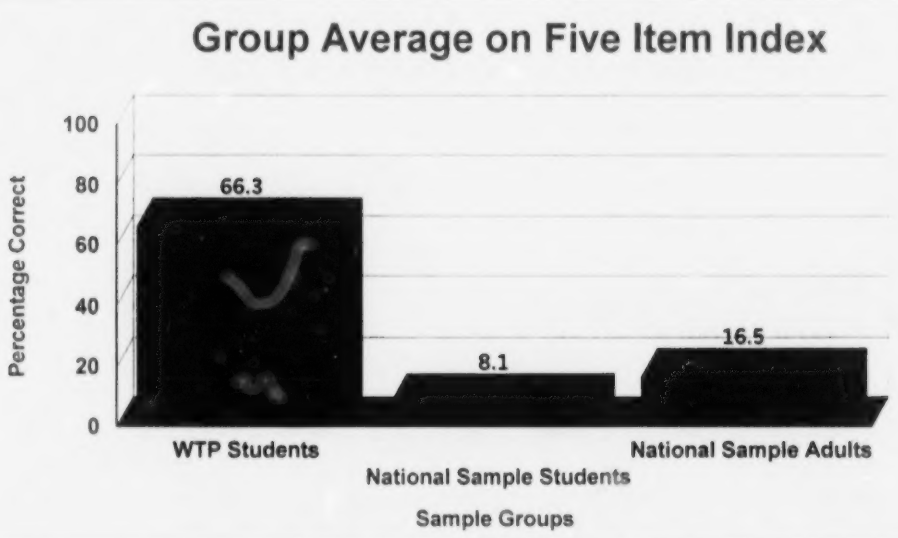
ANES respondents ranged in age from 18 to over 80 years while **We the People…** students are, on average, 18 years old. Overall, **We the People…** students outperformed the national sample from the American National Election Studies by an average of 28%.

These same five questions were asked of 9^{th}-12^{th} grade students and their parents in 55,708 randomly selected households for the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES). NHES is a national study of adults and youth conducted by Westat for the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education. The results were reported in Niemi and Chapman's *The Civic Development of 9^{th}-12^{th} Grade Students in the United States: 1996.*

Comparing the number of questions answered correctly by **We the People…** students, 9^{th}-12^{th} grade students, and their parents, **We the People…** students easily outperform the other students (some of whom may be younger), but more impressively, they outperform the adults.

Correct answers Range 0 to 5	WTP students (mostly 12th grade)	9th-12th grade students, from the NHES	NHES parents
0 correct	2%	24.2%	16%
1 correct	1.3%	24.9%	15.7%
2 correct	3.5%	16.5%	16.2%
3 correct	7.8%	14.8%	16.8%
4 correct	19.0%	11.5%	18.8%
5 correct	66.3%	8.1%	16.5%

In fact, 66.3% of **We the People…** students answered all 5 questions correctly while only 8.1% and 16.5%, respectively, of the national sample of high school students and their parents did so. **We the People…** students dramatically outperformed the student and adult national samples.



IV. We the People... Participant Political Attitudes

The survey results show that **We the People...** students have much more positive attitudes towards democracy compared to various national samples. Increased knowledge can help young citizens look past the overwhelmingly negative portrayal of the government by the media to make informed decisions autonomously. Perhaps this is why many students noted that the increase in their political knowledge went hand in hand with more political engagement and more positive attitudes toward democracy after participating in **We the People....** The students also professed to be less cynical about government after meeting and interacting with government officials who displayed civic virtue.

A. We the People... versus Monitoring the Future

Questions 24-28 and 31 of the **We the People...** survey were designed to measure students' attitudes toward American politics. The questions are part of *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth* (MTF), a 1997 survey administered to approximately 16,200 high school seniors. Begun in 1975, the MTF annual surveys explore changes in values, behaviors, and lifestyle orientations of contemporary American youth. MTF is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Of the **We the People...** students surveyed, nearly 75% identified themselves to be white, and 90% responded that they intended to go to college or college and graduate

school. Because this vast majority of national finalists are white and college-bound, we compared them to white college-bound respondents of the MTF survey (N=917).

The questions measure cynicism by addressing a number of different facets of American politics. Across all five questions, **We the People...** students responded with less cynicism than the white, college-bound national sample of students. For example, when asked whether government officials are crooked/dishonest, 79.2% of the national sample thought that all or a majority of them are crooked or dishonest while only 23.5% of **We the People...** students responded similarly. Though both groups were somewhat similarly confident in government leaders' abilities, **We the People...** students expressed more confidence than the corresponding national sample. **We the People...** students also report higher levels of trust that the federal government is "doing what is right" some or a majority of the time. The largest difference in responses concerned opinion of government spending of tax money. Only 17.2% of **We the People...** students, versus 62.2% of the national sample, thought that most or all of tax money is wasted.

	WTP	MTF
All or most people running the government are crooked or dishonest.	20.8%	62.8%
Very or somewhat confident that people running the government know what they are doing.	68.6%	60.2%
All or most tax money is wasted.	17.2%	62.2%
Can trust government in Washington to do what is right all or a majority of the time.	57.7%	33.3%
Government is mostly run for the benefit of all people.	28.9%	13.1%

Differences between students is highly significant at Pearson Chi-square $p<.001$

When asked whether government is run for a few big interests or for the benefit of all people, nearly the same amount of **We the People...** students felt that the government is run always or mostly for the benefit of the people as those who felt that it is run for a

few big interests looking out for themselves. Yet even in this area where **We the People...** students displayed the most cynicism, almost half of them replied that government is run equally for the benefit of the people as well as big interests.

We the People... students and students in the national sample were also questioned regarding their intent to participate in certain political activities, such as registering to vote, donating to a political candidate or cause, working in a political campaign, participating in a lawful demonstration, and boycotting products or stores. **We the People...** students were more likely than students in the national sample to declare that they "will" participate in any given political activity. In virtually all of the measures questioned, **We the People...** students were significantly more likely than white college-bound students in the national sample to declare that they will or already have participated.

	WTP	MTF
Will or have already registered to vote	97.7%	95.6%
Will or have already written to a public official	64.1%	43.6%
Will or have already donated to a political candidate or cause	39.2%	18.8%
Will or have already worked in a political campaign	44.5%	14.6%
Will or have already participated in a lawful demonstration	53.9%	25.8%
Will or have already boycotted certain products or stores	43.6%	34.1%
Average Participation Score	68.6%	38.8%

While nearly all students in both groups said that they have or will register to vote, differences emerge in other types of political activity. A larger percentage of **We the People...** students have contacted or will contact public officials or donate money. The most striking difference is that 44.5% of **We the People...** students reported having worked or would be willing to work in political campaigns, compared to just 14.6% of

the national sample. Also, over half of the **We the People…** students have participated or will participate in a lawful demonstration, compared to only a quarter of the national sample. What emerges is a portrait of program participants as a politically informed and active group. These findings indicate that **We the People…** students are politically engaged, in contrast to reports indicating otherwise for American youth as a whole.

B. We the People… versus American College Freshmen

The Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles publishes an annual report entitled *American Freshmen: National Norms*. These reports are based on surveys of freshmen attending colleges and universities as first-time, full-time students. The data shown below are from the **We the People…** sample and from the *American Freshmen: National Norms* report published in December 1999. The survey data encompassed 261,217 students at 462 of the nation's two- and four-year colleges and universities and were adjusted by the Higher Education Research Institute to reflect the responses of the first-time, full-time students entering college in fall 1999. These survey questions have been asked for more than thirty-five years and thus allow researchers to capture trends among American young adults.

As shown by the *Freshmen* surveys, political interest is on a decline in the American young adult population. It is encouraging that, according to the Center survey, participants in the **We the People…** program conceived of citizenship as active and engaged.

In 1966, "keeping up to date" with political affairs was considered very important or an essential life goal by 57.8% of students nationwide. That percentage dropped to an all-time low of 26.3% of students in 1999. Additionally, in 1999, only 16.8% of American college freshmen responded that it was very important or essential to influence the political structure.

Keeping abreast of political affairs, in conjunction with knowledge of politics, is important for an effective citizenry. Without these skills, citizens are not able to fully understand the political issues affecting their lives, nor are they able to effectively promote change. Eighty-one percent of **We the People…** students found it imperative to keep abreast of political affairs, and 59.2% thought it very important or essential to influence the political structure. Much smaller percentages of the national sample of freshmen at the nation's four-year colleges felt the same way.

Objectives Considered to be Essential or Very Important	**WTP**	**Freshmen**
Keep up to date with political affairs	81.3%	26.3%
Influence the political structure	59.2%	16.8%
Be very well off financially	54.7%	71.3%
Develop a meaningful philosophy of life	85.8%	41.4%
Become a community leader	55.2%	30.8%
Help others who are in difficulty	86.6%	62.5%

Compared to American freshmen, **We the People…** students also place less value on wealth and place more importance on developing a meaningful philosophy of life, becoming a community leader, and helping others in difficulty. All in all, significantly larger percentages of them than the national college freshmen sample profess to possess the civic virtue believed by many Founders as necessary for the well being of a democracy.

V. Student Feedback on the We the People... Program

Students were asked to provide feedback on the **We the People...** program. Ninety-four percent of the students professed to having increased their knowledge of democratic institutions after participating in the program, with 72% also saying that they increased their support for them as well. Their enthusiastic and positive open-ended responses were particularly illuminating. They commented not only on their increased knowledge about democracy, but also on their passion for democracy and desire to learn more about it. A student from Missouri, summing up the general attitude seemingly shared by most of the participants, wrote, "Not only has the extensive research deepened my understanding, but it has given me a passion as well." A student from Wisconsin wrote, "After participating in the **We the People...** program I have the foundation, knowledge and tools necessary to perform my civic duties and participate in American politics." Finally, a student from Oregon echoed one of the fundamental aims of the **We the People...** program by writing, "I've learned so much about government, civic virtue, and myself from this program."

Question 36 of the **We the People...** survey asked students whether participating in the program increased their support for democratic institutions and to describe their experience. Although 72% of the students said that their support for democratic institutions increased, 19% of them remained neutral, demonstrating the same *moderation* that the Founders considered so crucial to democracy. A student from New Mexico said, "Although more knowledgeable than the average person, I'm not an expert on any of the subjects and would like to learn more about them before I get too incredibly involved." A student from West Virginia expressed the highest form of support for democratic

institutions, saying, "Not only do I wish to support them but I want to go into politics myself." A student from Indiana also expressed a change of attitude after participating in the **We the People…** program, noting, "I used to be a lot more cynical about dirty politicians, etc., but **We the People…** showed me that even though they might be working to serve themselves, enlightened self-interest can still prevail."

Combined with the written responses of the students, it also seems that while increased knowledge does not necessarily translate into increased support, it allows for a more thoughtful and less cynical assessment of democracy. The goal of civic education, after all, is to provide citizens with skills to evaluate and to critically consider the merits and shortcomings of their government and policy proposals. A student from New York wrote, "Rather than merely speaking against the system, the program has inspired me to take it upon myself to change it." This independent and knowledgeable formulation of opinions truly reflects democratic principles even when it leads to negative conclusions. Furthermore, those who displayed dissatisfaction of democratic institutions mostly did so because of flaws in our system of democracy, thereby showing their support for its ideal form. One student wrote, "I believe in democratic institutions but not everything in [our] system is democratic or fair." In conclusion, participants' comments are thoughtful, whether they displayed increased support or criticism of the American political system. A student from Wisconsin wrote, "It has its faults, but I am convinced that overall, the system works and is the best one possible to protect the rights of the people."

V. Conclusion

This study was designed to measure political knowledge and support for democratic institutions and processes among students participating in the **We the People… The Citizen and the Constitution** program administered by the Center for Civic Education. Classes that compete in the programs, national finals have received the most in-depth exposure to the materials. Therefore, these students were surveyed to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Measures included here show that high school seniors who participate in the **We the People…** program are better informed across *every* aspect of political knowledge measured than national samples of high school seniors, college freshmen, and adults. Knowledge and skills gained through program participation both empower students and strengthen American democracy, which relies on at least a minimally informed public (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). Furthermore, **We the People…** students are far less cynical about American politics and government than a corresponding national sample of high school seniors resulting their higher political participation. In contrast to college freshmen, participating students possess more active and engaged citizenship dispositions.

These findings, as well as students' own written feedback, suggest that participants in the **We the People…** program are more likely to support democratic processes and institutions or to supply reasoned and informed critiques thereof. The evaluation further suggests that participants emerge better prepared for citizenship, with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are conducive to full participation in the American political process.

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Attachment A (Survey Instrument)

We the People...
The Citizen and the Constitution

Directed by the Center for Civic Education
Funded by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress

Student Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of an evaluation of the *We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution*. Your opinions will provide us with important information. Please answer ALL questions as thoughtfully and frankly as possible. Your answers will be kept strictly condidential. Please use a dark pen or pencil to completely fill in the bubbles that correspond with your responses and PRINT in the spaces provided. Thank you!

Question 1 refer to the quotation below.

"Absolute arbitrary power, or governing without settled laws, can neither of them be consistent with the ends of society and government." - John Locke

1. Which of the following statement is most consistent with the Locke quotation above?
   a. Weak government is worse than no government.
   b. Government power should be limited.
   c. Laws should never be changed.
   d. Only wise people can exercise power.

2. Which statement about the making of United States foreign policy is accurate?
   a. State governments, through their ability to negotiate independent trade agreements, have preeminent authority in making foreign policy.
   b. The Senate, because of its power of treaty ratification, has more power in setting foreign policy than does the president.
   c. The Supreme Court, because it can rule on the constitutionality of executive actions, dominates foreign policy.
   d. Congress and the courts have some authority over foreign policy, but the president and the state department have the greatest authority.

3. The primary purpose of the Bill of Rights was to
   a. limit the spread of slavery in the United States
   b. limit the power of the federal government
   c. establish judicial review
   d. allot specific powers to the states

4. Imagine that Congress is considering severe cutbacks in the Social Security program. Which of the following national interest groups would be most concerned about and opposed to such a policy?
   a. Mothers Against Drunk Drivers
   b. American Association of Retired Persons
   c. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
   d. American Bar Association

Question 5-6 refer to the quotation below.

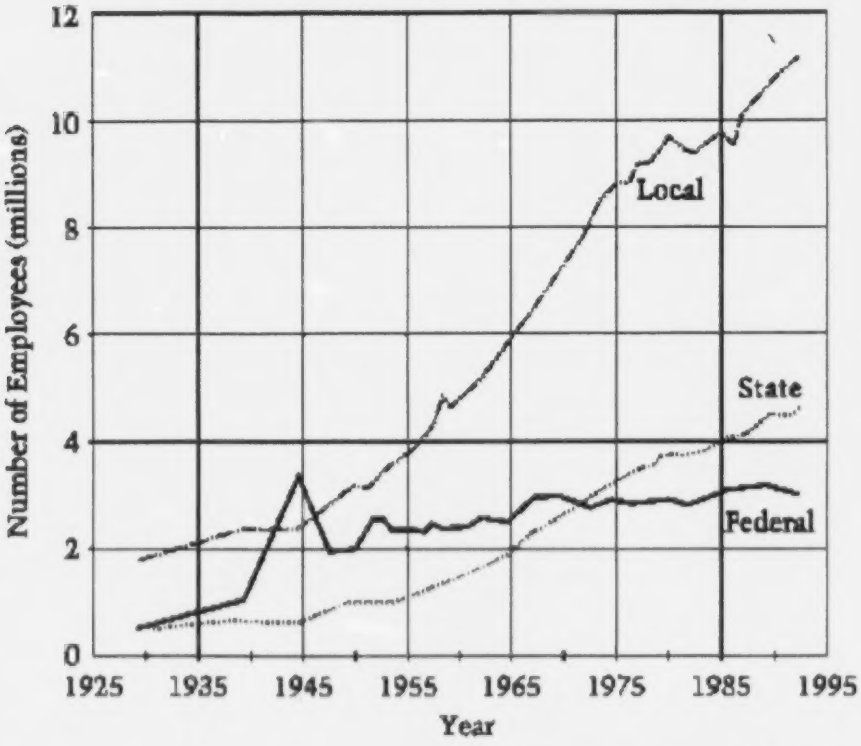
I often wondered whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws and upon courts. These are false hopes; believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lives in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it. - Judge Learned Hand, 1941

5. Which of the following best summarizes Judge Hand's argument about constitutional democracy in the United States?
   a. Constitutions are a serious obstacle to individual liberties.
   b. Constitutions allow governments to disregard individual liberties.
   c. Individual liberties depend on citizens committed to the protection of those liberties.
   d. Individual liberties can only be safeguarded by a written constitution and an independent judiciary.

6. It can be concluded from the quotation that Judge Hand believed it was most important that citizens
   a. vote for candidates who support their views.
   b. rely on the courts to safeguard their rights.
   c. amend the Constitution whenever necessary.
   d. protect their freedoms through political participation.

7. What happens to most of the bills introduced in the House of Representatives?
   a. They become laws.
   b. They are passed but then vetoed by the president.
   c. They are passed by the House but not by the Senate.
   d. They are never sent by committees to the full House.

NUMBER OF FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, 1929-1992



13. Which statement helps to explain the data presented in the graph above?

a. Federal government has been growing much faster than state or local governments because increasing numbers of people rely on the federal government for different services.

b. Local governments employ more people than do state or federal governments because local governments meet the direct needs of so many people in so many different places.

c. State governments employ fewer people than do local governments because state governments are run much more efficiently than are local governments.

d. Federal, state, and local governments have increased at the same rates over a 70-year period because the system of federalism divides responsibilities among different levels of government.

Questions 14-15 refer to the statement below.

The United States is not a fully democratic country. The framers of the Constitution created a system in which majorities, even large majorities or their representatives in Congress, do not have the right to do anything and everything they want.

14. Which aspect of the American system of government shows one of the limits on the power of majorities discussed above?

a. The ability of Congress to override presidential vetoes.

b. The Supreme Court's power to overturn unconstitutional laws.

c. The right of Congress to impeach presidents and federal judges.

d. The ability of people in many states to vote public initiatives into law.

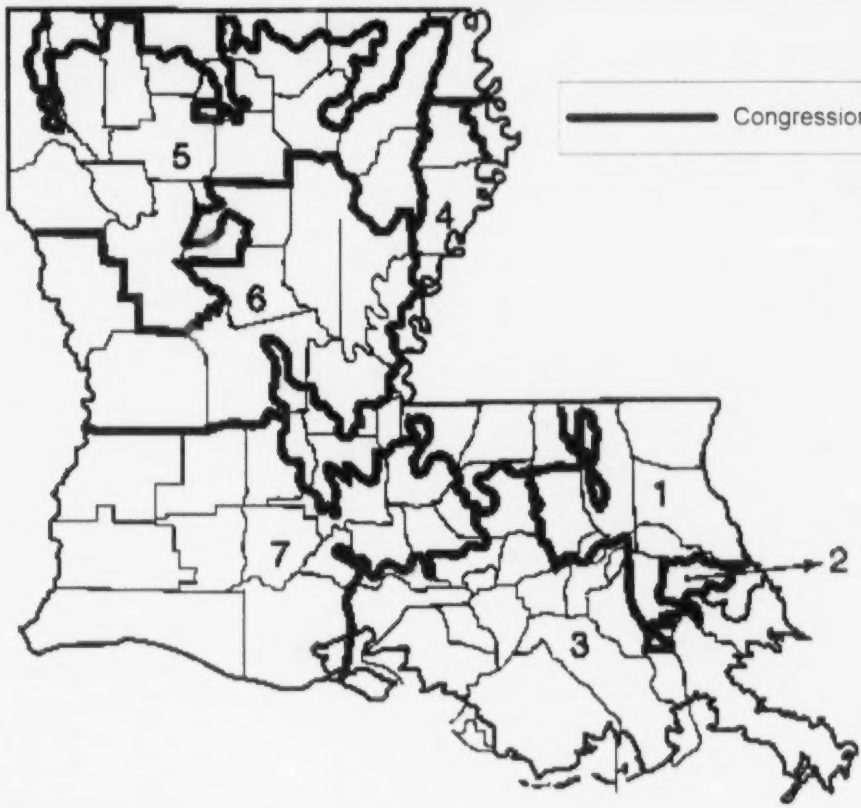
15. The Framers of the Constitution wanted to limit the power of majorities in order to

a. encourage the growth of political parties.

b. ensure that state governments would remain weak.

c. enable the government to act quickly in times of crisis.

d. protect the rights of individuals and minorities.



Questions 21-23 refer to the map above, which shows congressional districts in Louisiana. The numbers on the map refer to congressional districts.

21. The congressional district boundaries shown on the map were probably drawn by the
    a. state constitutional convention
    b. United States Congress
    c. Federal Election Commission
    d. Louisiana state legislature

22. Which of the following would best explain why there may be more than seven congressional districts in Louisiana in the year 2002?
    a. The state legislature votes to increase the number of representatives to give the state more decision-making power.
    b. The year 2000 census indicates that the population of Louisiana increased proportionately more than that of other states.
    c. The Supreme Court decides to increase the number of representatives in all southern states.
    d. Citizens of Louisiana vote yes on a referendum to increase the number of representatives in Congress.

23. From the map, you can conclude that congressional district 2 must
    a. include a large urban area.
    b. have fewer people than the other districts.
    c. have been drawn to protect an incumbent.
    d. be a very old congressional district.

YOUR OPINIONS

24. What do you think about the people running the government?
    a. All of them are crooked or dishonest.
    b. A majority are crooked or dishonest.
    c. About half are crooked or dishonest.
    d. Very few are crooked or dishonest.
    e. None are crooked or dishonest.

25. How much tax money do you think is wasted?
    a. All of the tax money is wasted.
    b. Most of the tax money is wasted.
    c. About half of the tax money is wasted.
    d. Very little of the tax money is wasted.
    e. None of the tax money is wasted.

33. Have you ever done, or do you plan to do, the following things?

	Won't do	Will do	Already done	Undecided
a. Register to vote				
b. Vote in a public election				
c. Write to public officials				
d. Donate to political candidate or cause				
e. Work in a political campaign				
f. Participate in a lawful demonstration				
g. Boycott certain products or stores				

34. Please indicate the importance to you of each of the following:

	Essential	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
a. Keeping up to date with political affairs				
b. Influencing the political structure				
c. Being well-off financially				
d. Developing a meaningful philosophy of life				
e. Becoming a community leader				
f. Helping others who are in difficulty				

35. Has participating in the **We the People... The Citizen and the Constitution** program increased your knowledge of democratic institutions?

Strongly Agree	Mostly Agree	Neither	Mostly Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Please describe.

36. Has participating in the program increased your support for democratic institutions?

Strongly Agree	Mostly Agree	Neither	Mostly Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Please describe.

Please continue on back side.